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CORRESPONDENCE

CLIMATIC CHANGES.

To the American Geographical Society:

In my article on climatic changes,* Professor Huntington's reconstruction of oriental history was confronted with the facts and was shown to be in almost every detail unwarranted, a conclusion with which every orientalist to whom I have sent reprints has agreed. In his reply, Professor Huntington has made almost no attempt to argue away these facts. Further comment would be unnecessary had he not made certain accusations which demand an answer.¹

As a student of history, I had no opinion on the general theory, though so far from "attacking" it, I said "There may have been such fluctuations as the theory demands." I am not "possessed of a moderate knowledge of climatology" though I believe I have read everything of Professor Huntington's from the *Zeitschrift für Ethnologie* to *Harper's*. When, however, he attempts to explain details in oriental history, it is not only my right but my duty to test such application. This was done in my article and it was because his misuse of historical data threw grave suspicion on the theory that it was presented to geographers. Yet even if his California data prove the general theory, this cannot change the fact that his reconstruction of oriental history is entirely false.

Much of his error is due to the use of antiquated secondary works, it would seem, for Professor Huntington gives no references for his statements. His failure to verify sources is shown in a glaring manner by his attempt to turn my incidental reference to the Lucian road against me. Had he verified it, easily found in the Fowler translation, III. 220, he would have read the following:

"Alexander . . . was lord of Persia; his orders had to be conveyed to every part of his empire by dispatch runners. Now from Persia to Egypt was a long journey; to make the necessary circuit round the mountains, traverse a great desert, and so finally reach Egypt, took at the best full twenty days. . . . A Sidonian trader came to him and offered to shorten the distance: if a man cut straight across the mountains, which could be done in three days, he would be in Egypt without more ado. This was a fact; but Alexander took the man for an impostor . . . A trial will soon show you that you may fly over the mountains from Persia to Egypt, and in a day, in part of a day, take rank as rhetorician."

It is clear that Lucian is not referring to conditions of his own day but to those of *five centuries* before. Had Professor Huntington verified this passage, whose highly rhetorical tone made me uncertain as to whether the desert road was any more a "fact" than the "fact" of the three days road from Persia to Egypt, he would hardly have used it to prove climatic conditions in Lucian's time.

His statement that I "attempt to prove" that there was no road across the desert in pre-Hellenistic times shows a strange inability to understand on whom

* *Bulletin*, Vol. 44, 1912, pp. 432-447.

¹ This note, in somewhat longer form, was sent to the *Bulletin* immediately after the publication of the original discussion. Pressure of space has delayed its publication. Meanwhile, Professor Huntington has published an article in the *American Historical Review* in which, while quoting *in extenso* from an article of mine in a journal devoted to geography in the secondary schools, he has ignored my serious criticism which had appeared six months before in the *Bulletin*.

falls the burden of proof. Out of hundreds of references to east and west roads, it is unthinkable that we should have none to a desert one did such a one exist. Until he can show at least one such reference *in the sources*, the argument from silence absolutely prohibits the hypothesis of a desert road.

As to the "unproved statement" in regard to the present day post road across the desert, my authority was Consul Magelssen, confirmed by bazaar gossip, to the effect that the Turkish, not English, post across the desert had just then, February 1908, been robbed. Can Professor Huntington give as good authority for the Palmyra part of his statement that "all modern caravans" go "through Palmyra or Aleppo"?

One reference Professor Huntington has verified, that to the Encyclopedia Britannica, and has then denounced me for the "rash way in which" I have used figures and for my "extreme inaccuracy," an accusation serious enough, if true, to exclude me from the ranks of serious students of history. Yet on the very next page he softens it down to "thus it will be seen that while Professor Olmstead is *technically right* (!), . . . his statement is one of those misleading truths which lead to wrong conclusions." Even this does not prepare us to find that his sole objection is that I have followed general usage, both ancient and modern, in applying all the trade data of all Arabia while he would limit "Arabia" for trade purposes to a fragment for which, so far as I know, he has warrant neither in ancient nor in modern writers. Even if he may define "Arabia" as he will, he surely has no right to accuse me of "extreme inaccuracy" when I quote accurately figures dealing with what all writers, ancient and modern, recognize as Arabia. Nevertheless, I am willing to accept his truncated Arabia for comparison if he too will deduct for antiquity the whole trade of the Red Sea and Persian Gulf. When he has done this, where is his authority to prove that his truncated Arabia had in antiquity a trade which could be considered "highly important" in comparison with the "practically nothing" of even \$5,000,000?

When Professor Huntington criticises me for being "far from careful in his representations of the views of others," no one would dream that one seventh of my paper by actual count had been devoted to giving "in his own words Professor Huntington's explanations" in the vain hope that this too common accusation might be avoided. Exact quotation of every passage would have made my paper, already too long, impossible of publication, and it is in one of these longer passages that he thinks I have misrepresented him. But he has misunderstood me for I did not believe that any educated man accepted literally all Biblical numbers. His mistake lies in accepting as of *any* value the huge figures so characteristic of documents which the Biblical criticism he decries has proved late and untrustworthy. The very modest numbers found in early sources could never support a theory of a heavy population in early Palestine.

Professor Huntington insists that my "statement that no one" of the Arab oases "can be proved to have been more fertile than at present is absolutely without foundation." I merely meant I knew of no such evidence. He can justify so emphatic a counter statement only by proof from the sources. Why has he not produced it?

Nor did I believe he thought "the desert blossomed as the rose" in antiquity or attempt to prove that the desert, as such, was then a desert. Professor Huntington made certain very definite statements such as "the ancient writers . . . were either fools or knaves" if they said "almost nothing" of the hardships of travel in Sinai and of the impossibility of its supporting multitudes of people,

that there was then "passage of trade and armies across regions *now* desert," that "the crossing of the desert" was "much easier than at present," that there were routes then for safe travel while today caravans "do not travel at all for lack of water," that "the desert four and a half millenniums ago" was "peaceful and easily traversed," that "trade of the brisker description" passed over "regions now desert" that "remote parts of Arabia were more accessible than now." To take me to task for proving that Arabia was a desert in antiquity because "no one doubts it for a moment" is evading the fact that every one of my proofs was to directly disprove a definite statement of his.

In my former article, I attempted to confront the reconstructions of Professor Huntington with the facts in a purely impersonal manner. His personal accusations such as "extreme inaccuracy" have introduced of necessity a personal element which I greatly regret. That these accusations are baseless, this note should show. As to his reconstruction of the ancient oriental history, it still remains true that he has not been able to meet one single objection with a proof text from the sources. Until he does so, students of oriental history will not further waste their time in discussing this application of his theory.

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